

# A Case Study of an Early Childhood Teacher's Perspective on Working with English Language Learners

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## Introduction

The student population in United States early childhood education programs is becoming more diverse every year (Miller, Miller, & Schroth, 1997; Waggoner, 1994). The diversity of race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and language is quite dramatic in some instances (Wright, Chang, & Rocha, 2000, p. 50). English as a Second Language (ESL) education—English as a Foreign Language (EFL), Language-Minority Students (LMS), Limited English Proficient (LEP), Potentially English Proficient (PEP), or mainstreamed students—focuses on seeking the “appropriate” approaches to facilitate English language learners (ELLs) to improve proper academic skills (Young, 1996).

Drucker (2003) indicates that ‘academic proficiency’ in English is “the ability not only to use language for reading and writing but also to acquire information in content areas” (p. 22.) To develop ‘academic proficiency’ in English takes longer than to grow ‘peer-appropriate conversational skills.’ ‘Academic proficiency’ in English includes fewer contextual clues such as body language, gestures, facial expressions, or various signs to understand meanings of texts (Drucker, 2003).

“People learn to read, and to read better, by reading” (Eskey, 2002, p.8). In order to improve ELLs’ academic English, teach-

ers can help ELLs by previewing reading text (Drucker, 2003; Chen & Graves, 1998), providing contextual clues for reading (Drucker, 2003), choral reading (McCauley & McCauley, 1992), paired reading (Li & Nes, 2001), and simultaneous listening and reading of audiotaped stories (Conte & Humphreys, 1989).

At this point, Krashen (1981) argues for the importance of “I + 1.” The reading text should be provided at the level of ELLs’ current learning ability and should stretch their potential literacy level. Considering ELLs’ differences of conversational skills and academic skills in English, it is important to plan ELLs’ reading at their academic proficiency level, not at their oral ability level.

All children should have equal learning opportunities. As Lake and Pappamihiel (2003) suggest, however, “Fair does not mean ‘equal’; rather, treating children fairly means treating children differently.” In order to create “fair” learning environment, teachers’ instructional methods, contents, materials, and assessments vary depending on individual children’s cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

However, cultural and linguistic diversity indicates something more than language and literacy acquisition. Research has shown that many of these children feel loss, unsafe, alienated, and depressed (Congress & Lynne, 1994) when struggling to adapt and adjust to the diverse languages, knowledge expectations, traditions, attitudes, and values that exist between their home environment and their educational setting (NAEYC, 1996).

As our schools and communities become more diverse, it becomes increasingly important for teachers to be well prepared for teaching and learning in cross-racial, cross-ethnic, and cross-cultural situations. Teachers who are teaching in this multicultural era need to be sensitive to the diverse sociocultural backgrounds of children and should possess socioculturally

relevant knowledge, values, decision-making abilities, strategies, and actions. This is essential if teachers are to help these children learn more securely and meet their needs more equally by providing a safe, challenging, and nurturing environment.

In particular, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (1996) posits that early childhood teachers have to acknowledge the ESL learners’ ‘feeling of loneliness, fear, and abandonment’ in educational settings that are isolated from the ELLs’ home cultures and languages. Accordingly, they propose the goal of early childhood education as “equal access to high quality educational programs that recognize and promote all aspects of children’s development and learning and enabling all children to become competent, successful, and socially responsible adults” (NAEYC, 1996, p. 175).

As the school population continues to change, education has to focus on diminishing the conflicts between diverse cultural and linguistic children and others in the major socioculture (Miller & Tanners, 1995). In this context, Tinajero (1994) suggests that “Schools must ensure that the diverse needs of non-English and limited-English-proficient students are met, that they have access to all educational programs, and that they acquire high levels of proficiency in English” (p. 261). Diverse children should be part of a learning community where people acknowledge, help, and support one another.

A teacher with cross-cultural competence is considered as one:

who has achieved an advanced level in the process of becoming intercultural and whose cognitive, affective, and behavioral characteristics are not limited but are open to growth beyond the psychological parameters of only one culture....The intercultural person possesses an intellectual and emotional commitment to the fundamental unity of all humans and, at

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the same time, accepts and appreciates the differences that lie between people of different cultures. (Gudykunst & Kim, 1984, p. 230)

### Research Methodology

#### Research Questions

Based on the premise that teachers hold their own beliefs, values, knowledge, assumptions, and attitudes about diversity from their own life experiences (Tirri, Husu, & Kananen, 1999; van Driel, Beijaard, & Verloop, 2001; Zanting, Verloop, & Vermunt, 2001), this study is an effort to understand an experienced teacher's—Tiffany's—practical knowledge about cultural and linguistic diversity. As a collaborative work with "Tiffany," this study tries to connect to her personal and professional lives, classrooms, and teacher education programs.

In particular, this study is to examine the ways to work effectively with culturally and linguistically diverse children. The research questions are posed in light of this purpose: (a) What practices and discourses does an experienced teacher enact regarding ESL education? and (b) What suggestions and strategies does an experienced teacher have to support ELLs?

#### Research Participant

Tiffany is a teacher with six years of experience in a first grade classroom. She felt that she had a natural gift for teaching young children. It is necessary, according to Tiffany, for teachers to understand a variety of ability ranges of children, although she admits it is sometimes hard to determine their maximum learning potential. She was enrolled in the master's program at a university in the southern area of the US. Tiffany expressed an interest in expanding her knowledge about and experiences with diversity in her school and community.

She feels that she has a natural gift for teaching young children. "I like to teach. I always love working with children. I never thought about doing anything else." Tiffany thinks that hands-on activities and pre-assessments are important for understanding the prior knowledge of children and essential to effective teaching. It is necessary, according to Tiffany, for teachers to understand a variety of ability ranges of children, although she admits it is sometimes hard to determine their maximum learning potential.

#### Research Procedures

This study was conducted as a qualitative case study because this methodology concentrates on gaining in-depth understandings and insights into educational practice and its meaning of situation and context (Merriam, 1998), and because the case study "seeks to understand a larger phenomenon through close examination of a specific case and therefore focus on the particular" (Rossman & Rallis, 1998, p. 70).

Two face-to-face in-depth interviews were conducted focusing on Tiffany's practical knowledge of diversity that stems from her personal experiences in her own sociocultural context. Each interview lasted approximately one and one half hours. The interview was audiotaped in order to accurately record the language of the interviewee. The audiotaped was transcribed and shared with Tiffany for her review and approval.

#### Data Analysis

The interview transcripts were analyzed by re-reading, reducing, coding, and sorting into themes and categories (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Merriam, 1998) focusing on Tiffany's thinking and experiences regarding cultural and linguistic diversity. Tiffany has had personally and professionally with the issues of ELLs.

As we analyzed additional data, new themes and categories emerged and were added to the list of codes. We discussed the findings of data analysis and the interpretation with Tiffany in order to confirm and expand the depth of our understanding and meaning making. When we needed to clarify the meaning of Tiffany's responses, we checked our understandings and interpretations with her.

Trustworthiness of the study involves the concepts of credibility, transferability, and confirmability. 'Credibility' deals with the issue of compatibility between the researcher's constructions and informants' reality. In terms of credibility, this study uses member checks and peer examination (Merriam, 1998). Tiffany is asked to read the transcripts and tentative interpretations in order to ensure that they are plausible. The peer/colleague examination is used to solicit feedback and suggestions regarding changes or data analysis.

'Transferability' is concerned with the degree to which a study's findings can be applied in other contexts or with other participants. Because qualitative research is intended to get at deep understandings

about the phenomenon being studied rather than to generalize to many situations, this study is described in as rich and as thick terms as possible. The rich and thick description makes it possible for readers to apply some findings to their own situations.

'Dependability' is the degree to which a study's findings would be repeated if replicated with the same subjects in the same setting. In addition, confirmability deals with the extent to which a study's findings are the result of the inquiry and not of the biases of the researcher. In terms of dependability and confirmability, this study provides data-based evidence to support interpretations based on the paradigm assumptions and theories that undergird the study. Also, the data is able to be easily traced to original sources.

#### Research Findings

By analyzing interviews, this section focused on Tiffany's knowledge, beliefs, and experiences about diversity. In particular, Tiffany believed that the issues of ELLs and their families were the most important aspects of diversity.

Realizing that having ELLs in a class was one of the big challenges for teachers and other children in the class, she described ELLs' and parents' difficulties in schools, the importance of active social interactions with ELLs, teachers' positive attitudes of acceptance, understanding, and willingness to learn about their cultures, and appropriate and supportive instructional approaches in terms of ability level and English proficiency. Our understanding of Tiffany's practical knowledge about cultural and linguistic diversity was discussed in the following.

*ELLs as an indicator of diversity.* In discussing her experiences with diversity, Tiffany notes that the school where she currently teaches lacks diversity. "I have no children in my class who are being served through ESL. I do have two children who are from the Ukraine, but they do not qualify for ESL." From Tiffany's perspective, a classroom with children from other countries is not really diverse unless the children struggle with speaking English. She remembers, however, that the school where she taught previously was very diverse.

I had the majority of ESL children. At one point I had fourteen out of my eighteen children being served ESL, and every year I had between three and four children who came in and it was their

first school experience and they had just reached the United States and did not speak English.

*Recognizing ELLs' feelings of being alienated.* Tiffany finds that children who come from different cultural backgrounds and speak little English do not participate in classroom activities. "The children especially that were brand new and had very limited English would sometimes not want to try. They were a little worried about it." She thinks that children with limited English fluency are quiet and shy about participating in large group activities. "They were very unsure of themselves. Even when most of the children in my class did speak Spanish and had that experience, they were still in that quiet stage."

Tiffany adds, however, that the lack of participation of children who cannot speak fluent English is not merely a reflection of their difficulties with language comprehension. Tiffany believes the issue is more complex, and acknowledges that sociocultural differences can block the active participation of ELLs in classroom activities. Tiffany notes children's prior experiences with playdough as an example.

They'd not seen or experienced things like Playdough. They'd never seen it, didn't know what to do with it, were kind of afraid of it because they didn't know what it was like.

*The importance of teacher's efforts to communicate with ELLs' parents.* "They did not speak English....I always had to rely on translators. I picked up a few phrases here and there." Tiffany acknowledges that communication issues involve both ELLs and their parents. She brings to mind the challenges of communicating with ESL parents, and is aware that this is a big issue in schools.

We found that a lot of the parents were worried about communicating with the school. They didn't know the language, so we would have problems getting parents to curriculum night and to parent teacher conferences.

She notes that there are even more challenges when teachers attempt to communicate with children's parents about academic or discipline problems related to school.

Even when it came down to academics, it was really difficult. If you sent a note home asking for help or just to even let them know there was a discipline problem, they were falling behind, it was hard to get the notes back.

Seeking out the help of translators, Tiffany emphasizes the need for teachers to keep trying and to increase communication with ELLs' parents. "At my old school that had the highly diverse population they did hire people who were bilingual, and they would come in, write notes to the parents or translate the notes, and call home for me if I needed to." She notes that older siblings who are fluent in English can also serve as translators.

A lot of times I would grab the older brother or sister who was in the same home, can you read it for me and let them read it for me and they would have to serve as the translator at home if nobody spoke English.

She indicates that it is good to have older siblings translate because they are willing to help out the teachers, whereas the school staff translators are overwhelmed trying to keep up with many people. At this point, Tiffany states that it is teachers' own continuous efforts to help and communicate with children's parents that are most important, even when the help of translators is available.

*ESL classes are beneficial for children.* Tiffany feels that ESL classes that focus on language activities can definitely help children. She relates how an ESL teacher would regularly visit her classroom under the auspices of inclusion.

We had such a diverse population. I had an ESL teacher who would actually come into the classroom and serve the children that tested with the lab test and determined if they would qualify for the ESL program.

Tiffany notes that the inclusion teacher primarily used small group guided reading strategies, depending on the individual child's level of English.

In my room, because it was an inclusion room, she worked with about five children at a time and did reading experiences with the children depending on their reading level in small groups.

In addition, Tiffany notes, the ESL teacher will do many language activities such as vocabulary building with ELLs, usually centering around seasonal themes. "If it was winter, talk about kinds of things like that, the weather, kind of the language enriched kind of activities."

Tiffany thinks of ESL classes in a positive light and describes feelings of children who have participated in them. She explains that most ELLs feel special and believe they enjoy the ESL class even when it is a pull out program.

They didn't feel like they were just being singled out. They thought I get to go to somewhere where the other children didn't get to go—they really did. My other children would get jealous sometimes so the ESL teacher would choose a day they would get to bring a friend to participate, so they really enjoyed it. They liked to visit the other teacher who was working with the ESL children.

*The importance of social interactions to ELLs' language development.* Even though she experiences various struggles working with ELLs, Tiffany experiences satisfaction from seeing ELLs' progress and growth with respect to language development and social interactions with peers.

I really liked working with them because I saw the most growth with those children who only had a year or two of experience in the United States. They came in speaking no English and I had three out of four, who actually exited the ESL program.

Tiffany elaborates, explaining how "amazing" it is to see children come in her classroom not speaking English, and leave reading at second and third grade levels by the end of the year. She finds that ELLs experience frustration trying to express themselves, even though they are bright.

They just didn't understand what I was asking them a lot of the time. You can always see that in mathematics there is no language there, so they could express themselves a lot in math.

In addition, Tiffany points out that other classmates' acceptance of ELLs and collaborative experiences particularly help ELLs grow and change: "When they leave they're like a totally different child. They're reading, talking, and playing, whereas when they came in they were silent." She is especially cognizant of children's peer interactions and their attempts to communicate in spite of cultural and linguistic differences.

It was amazing watching them learn ways to communicate—pointing, they'll figure things out, and they'll try to teach a lot of times the other child how to speak things, to say things in English. You would think that they would sit there very quietly and not have any social peers, but, especially in the age group that I teach, that's not usually a problem. Even if they don't speak the same language, they'll hold hands and run around.

*The importance of creating a safe learning environment for ELLs.* Tiffany confesses that she faced many challenges the first couple of years working with

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ELLs. "I didn't understand what to do with them. I wanted to help them but it was very hard." She makes a conscious decision to obtain an ESL endorsement in order to better help children from diverse sociocultural backgrounds. The ESL endorsement involves a year long series of three classes. With the add-on endorsement, she is certified to teach kindergarten through twelfth grade.

There was a cultural class that we just explored the different cultures of the children we might get. There was a linguistics class, and there was also a kind of methods and materials class. We also had to teach for a week in summer class to teach the ESL.

She thinks that it is important for ELLs to have fun while engaged in learning activities. For this reason, she does lower level activities with ELLs in order for them to pick up on things quickly and experience early success.

I play doing games, not worksheets, because they were a little unsure of doing things like that because they didn't know if they were doing it correctly, or they didn't know what to do. So we did a lot of hands-on activities.

Through active involvement in hands-on activities, Tiffany hopes her ELLs will have learning experiences that involve multiple senses.

I do things called map tugs. I really do it with all the children, it really benefits everybody including the ESL children. I'd talk about money and we might have a store where you have to buy things. I play a lot of games with the ELLs. If we were practicing letters and sounds, they would have tactile letters. It's a children's book where they talked about the letters. They'd have this tree and they would have to stick the letters on it—they physically had to do something.

In addition, when she does card games with ELLs, she challenges them to beat her. "I would tell them I was going to keep it if they didn't get it correct. They would try to beat me a lot, that's what they liked to do was to make sure they beat the teacher." Tiffany purposefully lets her ELLs have the satisfaction of "beating" the teacher in her willingness to assume the role of the student. "I would kind of flub up a little bit and let them correct me." Similarly, she helps the ELLs feel confident in class by asking them to teach her their languages.

I took a step back and said, well, what can I do, so I tried . . . I would get them to

teach me too. I would teach them English and they would teach me Spanish. It was kind of a learning experience for both of us. They felt confident because they were teaching me something I didn't know, so they opened up a lot.

Through the co-teaching process, Tiffany finds the relationship with her ELLs to be more open and comfortable. She believes that all teachers should be required to establish a comfortable learning environment for ELLs, where they can learn safely without fear.

*Beyond 'tourist curriculum' and 'contributions approach': The importance of curriculum which fosters awareness and in-depth learning about different cultures.* Tiffany feels she has become more aware of what she does with children in her class as a result of experiences and interactions with diverse learners. "We study other countries and even when we make things, we try to include in our pictures children of all cultural backgrounds. We also talk about different things, like it's snowing today, does it snow everywhere?" She likes to use children's books from different countries to capture the interest of children, open their eyes to different cultures and connect the unfamiliar cultures to diverse children in the class.

I have an author study, and we would talk about different authors from different countries. Patricia Polaco is a Ukrainian, and we did a lot with her because I had a child who was Ukrainian, so he got to bring in some cultural things. There's a book called 'Rosetska's Eggs,' and she makes these little Ukrainian eggs, so he brought one in to show us.

While describing the "mini culture units" she likes to incorporate, she explains that teachers are required to include multicultural activities representing different countries. "In my county, we have to teach ten different countries; Canada, Mexico, and Brazil, those are the three countries we're responsible for making sure that the first graders know about. It's the curriculum. I like to do little mini units and just bring in more."

Tiffany admits that it is difficult for her to teach and for children to learn about Canada. She has trouble finding exciting curricular activities about Canada for young children. She also feels that children have limited contact or ties to Canada.

Canada is a really hard one because we can physically see where it is, but they have no ties to Canada. Canada is not a fun place for them. I don't think that they

really internalized much about Canada, because they're so young and it really has nothing to do with them.

By contrast, Tiffany notes that children find countries such as Mexico and Brazil interesting because they are exotic and different from their own places and lives. In addition, she thinks easy access to Hispanic children make the lessons of Mexico more meaningful for children. When Tiffany talks about the cultures of these countries with children, she makes a point of designing comparative lessons involving the United States.

We talk about all the geography and the holidays. We also talk about schools, children, what it's like for children, their daily lives, where they might live, what school is like. Those are the things that children are really interested in because they want to know what are the children doing.

For the curricular materials needed to develop multicultural lessons, Tiffany collects her own resources. She feels that her social studies resource guide is limited in terms of planning for these lessons. She designs her own lessons, centering on experiences which familiarize children with traditional artifacts and the literature of different countries.

I've spent a lot of time and money collecting things. I have a theme kind of table where I do review notes, a resource center is what I call it, and I put out things. For Mexico I have sombreros and maracas and kind of traditional things that you would see in Mexico—flags, books, children's literature that's in Spanish. We talk about the colors, the Spanish words for colors and we make a book about colors and we write it in Spanish. At the resource center they can go and learn by putting a sombrero on and see what it looks like to wear this hat, and a poncho, that kind of thing.

Tiffany plans numerous hands on activities about different cultures. In this context, she also tries to have a fiesta (party) with children.

We have a fiesta. We have food, parents make food, and we can learn things like Mexican hat dance. We learn a lot about the culture, but like I said, a lot of it with the curriculum is kind of this is the book and these are the facts, but I try to make it fun.

She feels that it is a good idea to get parents' support for doing these lessons. She invites parents to her classroom on a regular basis to share their cultures with children.

For Mexico, we've had some wonderful fiestas in our classroom because the parents, when they realize we're going to explore this culture that they're very familiar with, are very willing to come in and share what they know.

Essentially, Tiffany's approach to designing lessons filled with "fun" activities related to new and unfamiliar cultures is a reflection of the 'tourist curriculum' described by Derman-Sparks and the A. B. C. Task Force (1989) and Banks' (1995a) 'contributions approach.' Even though the intent of these curricular approaches is to develop children's positive and respectful attitudes about other cultures, they spotlight cultures primarily through special events such as celebrations, holidays, heroes or heroines. In these curricula, teachers teach about cultures through "exotic" cultural artifacts including food, traditional clothing, crafts, dance, and so forth, rather than through the effort to connect new cultures to children's ongoing daily curriculum and real-life experiences.

Derman-Sparks and the A. B. C. Task Force (1989) assert that it is important for teachers and children to have in-depth information and understanding about other cultures and to develop positive attitudes and interactions with cultural diversity. Simply visiting or entertaining other cultures' special celebrations may convey to children stereotypes, prejudices, and discriminations with respect to diversity.

*The importance of modifying curriculum to consider children's ability levels.* With her awareness of the increasing population of ELLs and families in school systems, Tiffany feels that teachers should actively put forth the effort needed to be aware of individual situations and difficulties. "You can't just let the children sit in your classroom and hope they catch something."

Through her participation in the ESL endorsement program, Tiffany has come to recognize the importance of modifying the school curriculum in order to accommodate the learning needs of all children. She believes that the school curriculum should be designed to start with assessment of baseline abilities of individual children and built through constant monitoring of their curricular achievement.

We have to modify work according to the children's ability level. If they're physically placed sometimes in classrooms even if they don't have the ability because of age, if they come from another country

to the United States, and we have to look back and work back at the curriculum and if they can't master the curriculum. In my case, first grade, if they are not able to do addition or subtraction, because they don't understand what you are talking about, or if they can't read, then I have to go back to the kindergarten, where the kindergarten teachers teach and I have to start there.

Tiffany emphasizes the importance of determining the baseline, particularly when working with ELLs:

If they do not understand what I am teaching because they don't speak the language, then you're not doing anything to help them, so you need to go back, take a couple of steps back, and start where the children can be successful.

*Strategies to assist children in developing positive ideas and attitudes about diverse cultures.* One of Tiffany's affective goals is to facilitate children's development of positive and respectful attitudes to diverse cultures. She recommends role playing as a particularly effective strategy in this regard. She gives children strips of paper with phrases or vignettes that illustrate various cultural issues, has them analyze the situations and conducts class meetings to talk about the issues.

The cultural issues depicted in the vignettes are ones that are commonly found in her own classroom or around the school. She explains her use of role playing strategies in addressing an issue such as the teasing of ELLs by other students from the dominant culture in her class.

We've really had problems in the past with children who wanted to laugh when people took chances, especially those children who didn't speak English, where they would try to answer questions and not come up with the right things. Some of them would get a little tickled and laugh and so we would stop and talk about how we think we should feel, and talk about ways that people try. They gave suggestions what they could do to encourage children to take risks, and this is what happened, what's a better way? What else could we have done? Instead of laughing what could we have done?

She describes the benefit of role playing: "Even though role playing is mostly based on what actually happened in a classroom or a school, when you take it outside to a role playing thing, then it doesn't embarrass anyone or worry somebody."

Tiffany also uses children's literature to address diversity issues with her students. Using children's books, she discusses

with children differences in people and the need to accept these differences.

I like to do that especially at the beginning of the year, try to take a week to talk about a friendship kind of theme. We talk about being friends, and what we need to do to be friends, and we need to be friends with everyone.

Recalling her work experiences in previous and current schools, she points to the value of character education in teaching for diversity. "That's new. One week they find kind of characteristics of good citizens"—things like respect, being helpful, being good listeners, and being friendly." She explains how character education is generally based on the principle that people are both different and same and that the similarities and differences among people should be appreciated.

In this regard, Tiffany thinks that no child should be excluded from classroom activities because (s)he is different from children of the more dominant culture. According to Tiffany, character education is a way of teaching values, and is typically incorporated into the curriculum on a weekly or monthly basis.

The teachers spend a little bit of time discussing it whenever the topic comes up during class time or down time, and talk about . . . like ours is being helpful this week. We talked about, brainstormed ways for being helpful, things we can do. In the school I'm at now, it's a really big push and they also have faculty members looking for children who are being really helpful, or exhibiting the word for the week, and we'll give them, oh, special recognition.

She evaluates character education as something that is beneficial for children in terms of addressing the multicultural goals of the curriculum. "I think it's wonderful. Really it's just like the life." She feels that character education actually brings to the surface values that children need to know to be successful in school and life. Even though Tiffany acknowledges that values should come mostly from children's home environment, Tiffany thinks that teachers have a responsibility to teach values in schools.

Tiffany recalls that the children in her previous school, which was more diverse, were much more aware of similarities and differences, making it easier for her to teach tolerance and acceptance. But she feels that in her current school it is more challenging to address issues of diversity: "With a school that's not so diverse it takes more effort to talk about strengths and

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weaknesses, and how we're the same and different, and acceptance, teaching acceptance." It is apparent from her comments that Tiffany considers diversity in terms of race and ethnicity, with only minimal emphasis on difference and diversity.

### Discussion

Tiffany indicates that the ultimate importance of discussing ESL issues is recognizing the increasing number of linguistically diverse populations in schools. She is attuned to ELLs' emotional well-being, cognizant of their feelings of alienation and frustration, and worried that many of them are shy about participating in class activities.

She also places emphasis on the difficulties of communicating with ELLs and parents and the need to foster their language development. Because Tiffany, as a teaching practitioner, needs to communicate and solve problems with parents regarding children's disciplinary or academic performance on a daily basis, she feels a stronger need to better communicate with parents. Being disappointed with the difficulty in finding translators when they are needed, Tiffany feels that ELLs and parents, first and foremost, should develop their English language skills.

Tiffany's ideas support Delpit's (1988) views that language-minority children can academically achieve by being taught the "rules of the culture of power" (Banks, 1995b). Delpit stresses that it is the teachers, not ELLs' home cultures that build the learning environment for language-minority children's achievement.

Even though Tiffany does not show disdain for ELLs' home cultures, she believes that ELLs and parents need to acquire mainstream culture's language and rules. At this point, it is important to note, however, that Tiffany does indicate that ELLs' learning difficulties are tied to both sociocultural backgrounds and language. Tiffany believes that children are socialized in their own sociocultural context, and that teachers' extensive understanding about their students' cultures can be significant tool in facilitating the academic achievement of ELLs.

Considering the important role of teachers, Eubanks (2002) indicates that children learn when the school settings are related to their lives and culture. Teachers' cultural awareness is defined as three stages (Eubanks, 2002; Quintanar-Saraelana, 1977). In the first stage of 'culturally unaware,' different culture is rejected in all

ways from the dominant culture. In the second stage of 'transition,' culture is shared and explored together. In the third stage of 'culturally aware,' teachers share and comprehend the differences of children's culture and integrate their language and culture within the curriculum, actively seeking strategies to teach ELLs.

Tiffany becomes more culturally responsive to ELLs' language and culture, as she mentions, working at a school environment with "huge diversity" in terms of demographic population. Along this same line, Tiffany feels that it is necessary for teachers to create a safe learning environment for ELLs by examining their own attitudes and teaching practices. She emphasized the close interactions with children and the need for open-mindedness that avoids stereotypes and prejudicial attitudes toward ELLs and their families. Her beliefs support the work of Cummins in this regard:

Language minority students' educational progress is strongly influenced by the extent to which individual educators become advocates for the promotion of students' linguistic talents, actively encourage participation in developing students' academic and cultural resources, and implement pedagogical approaches that succeed in liberating students from instructional dependence. (Cummins, 1986, p. 35)

To include ELLs in her class, Tiffany proposes practical approaches such as obtaining an ESL endorsement, introducing ESL programs, taking risks of vulnerability by learning ELLs' languages, doing active, hands-on activities, and using children's literature. She also recommends role playing and character education as strategies for learning English and assisting children in developing positive ideas and attitudes about diverse cultures. She considers practical and varied strategies, drawing on multiple resources such as other teachers, the media, and the community to help ELLs in terms of their language development, feelings of comfort and confidence, and learning interest and motivation.

Tiffany takes into account social interactions between teachers and children, and children and their peers, placing more value on 'skills-oriented classrooms' rather than 'traditional teacher-centered classrooms' as environments for language development. Her strategies are not intended to force children to simply acquire English language. Rather, her philosophies behind her strategies are to facilitate children's language development based on

their current level of learning. Acquiring an ESL endorsement, for example, Tiffany feels the need to modify her lessons considering each child's needs, interests, and developmental levels. She values children's literature and hands-on activities as "wonderful" opportunities to interact with children mediated by language rather than simply disseminating knowledge.

Interestingly, she indicates the importance of teachers' "vulnerability" with respect to ELLs' language learning. Showing ELLs that English is "a" language like their own and also that teachers are vulnerable learners, Tiffany tries to boost children's self-esteem in the different culture. It is her opinion that this approach will help children open up to the unfamiliar culture and more actively learn language by socially interacting with others who are English competent.

Tiffany feels that teachers for young children and school administrators truly need to open, accept, and enjoy the diversity in a school. She points out that they are often afraid of having diversity within their classrooms and schools. She thinks that teachers and children benefit from exposure to new, different, and fun things through interaction with people from diverse cultural backgrounds.

According to Tiffany, teachers and school administrators need to put more effort into developing a learning environment where diversity is valued, rather than simply relying on pull-out program materials and the expectation that children will automatically learn about diverse cultures. "You've got to put a little effort into it, but the rewards are wonderful."

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## Contribute to Voices of Justice the Creative Writing Section of Multicultural Education Magazine

**We're seeking** submissions of creative writing on topics including diversity, multiculturalism, equity, education, social justice, environmental justice, and more specific subtopics (race, gender/sex, sexual orientation, language, (dis)ability, etc.). Do you write poetry? Short stories or flash fiction? Creative nonfiction? We will consider any style or form, but we prefer prose that is no longer than 750 words and poetry that can fit comfortably onto a single page of text.

*Submissions will be reviewed on a rolling basis.*

And... If you're a teacher, Pre-K through lifelong learning, please encourage your students to submit to us! We would love submissions from the youngsters as well as the not-so-youngsters!

**Where to Submit:** Submissions may be sent electronically or by postal mail. Electronic submissions should be sent to Paul C. Gorski at pgorski01@gw.hamline.edu with the subject line "ME Submission." Hard copy, mailed submissions should be addressed to: Paul C. Gorski, Graduate School of Education, Hamline University, 1536 Hewitt Avenue, MS-A1720, St. Paul, MN 55104.

**Format:** All submissions should be double-spaced, including references and any other materials. Please send one copy of your submission with the title noted at the top of the page. The title of the manuscript, name(s) of author(s), academic title(s), institutional affiliation(s), and address, telephone number, and e-mail address of the author(s) should all be included on a cover sheet separate from the manuscript. If you are a student or if you are submitting work on behalf of a student, please include age, grade level, and school name.

**What to Send:** If you are submitting your work via postal mail, we ask that authors send the full text of the submission on a 3-and-one-half-inch High Density PC-compatible computer disk in any common word-processing program. If you wish the manuscript or other materials to be returned after consideration and publication, please also send a stamped and addressed return envelope large enough for that purpose.

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